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Survey of Communist Military Developments in Indochina

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January 23, 1975

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**SURVEY OF COMMUNIST
MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA***

(This report covers the period
January 9-22, 1975)

The Key Points

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- Detected supply shipments have been heavy during the past few weeks, in contrast to the relatively light activity reported during December.
- Government control in South Vietnam dropped more sharply in November than during any other month in 1974, according to Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) results.
- A recent CIA/DIA review of Communist and GVN combat forces in South Vietnam indicates that the strength of each side has declined during the past six months. A detailed report on Communist and South Vietnamese combat strengths is at Annex B.

* This report has been prepared jointly by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense.

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Preface

This report summarizes evidence received during the reporting period of (I) Communist efforts to infiltrate new manpower and military supplies toward and into South Vietnam, (II) significant combat activity, and (III) other developments affecting Communist military capabilities in Indochina.

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II. Combat Activity in South Vietnam

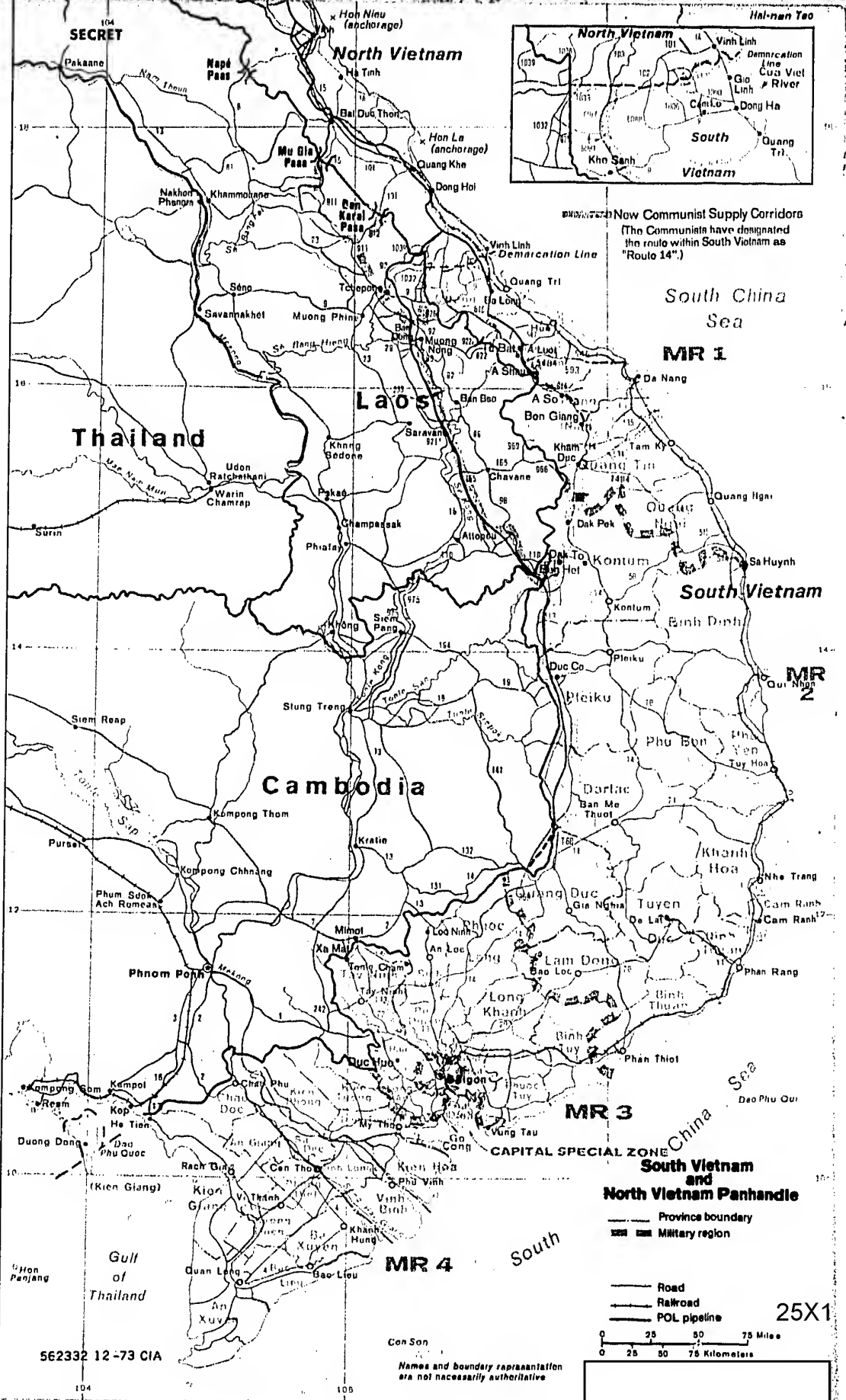
12. The overall level of combat activity in South Vietnam remained at a moderate level.

13. In MR 1, Government forces inflicted heavy casualties on the Communists as ARVN 1st Division elements recaptured Bong Mountain. Farther south, ARVN forces conducting clearing operations in southeastern Quang Nam Province reported killing some 150 Communists on January 19 and 20. Activity increased in MR 2 as ARVN forces conducted major operations north of Kontum and in the An Lao Valley. In the operation north of Kontum, government units met stiff resistance in their attempts to push toward Vo Dinh, a major Communist supply area. In coastal Binh Dinh Province, ARVN 22d Division forces continued operations designed to deny the An Lao Valley supply corridor to the Communists and reported more than 500 Communists killed in this action. On January 10, Communist sappers successfully penetrated the principle petroleum storage facility in Pleiku Province, destroying 35,000 barrels of gasoline, diesel fuel, and JP-4.

14. In other activity in MR 2, VNAF air strikes also apparently caused considerable damage during the reporting period. On January 13, South Vietnamese pilots attacked a 400-truck convoy moving through the tri-border area into Pleiku Province. The strikes reportedly destroyed more than 200 vehicles, along with eight 37-mm antiaircraft guns. Four days later VNAF aircraft again struck a large Communist convoy in the same general area, reportedly destroying about half of the 150 trucks sighted.

15. In MR 3, ARVN forces successfully defended and then broke the siege of Hoai Duc, a key district town in Binh Tuy Province. In the battle for that town, two Communist regiments suffered heavy casualties and were forced to withdraw. Sapper and terrorist attacks increased in the environs of Saigon. On January 10, Communist sappers attacked the main electric generating plant for the Saigon area, causing light damage and disrupting power to the city for a short time. Elsewhere, activity consisted of almost daily attacks by fires against Tay Ninh and its surrounding area and sporadic rocket attacks on the Bien Hoa Airbase. In MR 4, Communist-initiated incidents remained at a relatively high level but were scattered throughout the region. The most significant combat occurred in Kien Tuong Province as elements of the ARVN 9th Division conducted operations aimed at halting the Communist 5th Division's move into the Delta.

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III. Other Developments Affecting Communist Military Capabilities in Indochina

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November HES Results

18. Government control in South Vietnam, according to Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) results, dropped more sharply in November than any other month in 1974. All four military regions registered a decline in government control, led by MR 4 with 6 percentage points. During November, the number of people living in areas rated "A" or "B" declined by more than 500,000 - a decrease of nearly 3 percentage points from October's score of about 79%. Most of the people, however, did not come under direct Communist control, but are now considered in contested areas.

19. Countrywide, only three provinces - Quang Tin, Binh Thuan, and Long Khanh - showed increases of more than 2 percentage points, whereas 18 provinces reported losses of similar magnitude. Nine of these were in MR 4, five of which -- Kien Tuong, Vinh Long, Vinh Binh, Dinh Tuong, and Bac Lieu - sustained declines of at least 10 percentage points, as the Communists began to step up attacks against civilian installations and population centers in the Delta.

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ANNEX A

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INFILTRATION OF NORTH VIETNAMESE PERSONNEL
TO THE SOUTH

Number of Troops Entering the Pipeline Destined for South Vietnam,
Southern Laos, and Cambodia Since January 1, 1973¹

	COSVN	B-3 Front	MR 5	MR Tri- Thien	Southern Laos/ MR 559	Total
Total	68,500	23,500	29,000	25,500	38,500	185,000
1973						
Jan-Mar	12,000	5,500	4,000	5,000	1,000	27,500
Apr-Jun	1,000	....	....	7,000	1,500	9,500
Jul-Sep	....	....	5,000	2,000	4,500	11,500
Oct-Dec	4,500	2,000	....	....	20,000	26,500
1974						
Jan-Mar	28,500	7,000	6,000	....	....	41,500
Apr-Jun	6,500	1,000	9,000	3,000	....	19,500
Jul-Sep	....	....	5,000	5,500	5,500	16,000
Oct	....	....	....	500	....	500
Nov	4,000	....	....	2,000	1,000	7,000
Dec	4,500	5,000	....	500	2,000	12,000
1975						
Jan 1-22	7,500	3,000	....	....	3,000	13,500

1. Excluding special-purpose personnel. The totals are rounded to the nearest 500.

The number of North Vietnamese combat troops and specialists who have infiltrated south since the January 27, 1973, cease-fire accord now totals about

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214,000. Most of these -- about 189,000 -- have started south since then, while the remaining 25,000 were already in the pipeline as of the date of the settlement. The table shows the number of North Vietnamese troops starting south, by destination, since January 1, 1973.

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ANNEX B

STATUS OF COMMUNIST AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE
COMBAT FORCES

A recent CIA/DIA review of Communist and South Vietnamese regular combat forces* in South Vietnam indicates that the strength of each side has declined. The decline in GVN forces, however, in both relative and absolute terms, has been much greater than the Communists'. This imbalance occurred primarily because the decrease in South Vietnam's combat forces -- stemming from both the heavy casualties during the past few months and a conscious decision by Saigon to discharge a large number of malcontents, disabled troops, and long-time reservists -- has not been offset by recruitment. Nevertheless, the GVN does have sufficient manpower to increase its forces to previous levels by increasing the draft. In this connection, recent reporting indicates that President Thieu has ordered his Defense Minister to bring GVN forces up to full strength.

The decline in the overall strength of Communist combat forces resulted from the heavy fighting that has taken place since late summer. To date, these losses have not been completely offset by the 1974/75 flow of infiltrators to South Vietnam, many of whom are still moving through the system. Communist combat strength is now estimated at 181,000, or 3% below the previous October 1974 figure of 187,000.

In contrast, the strength of the South Vietnamese regular combat forces declined by some 51,000 men between March and November 1974 -- from an assigned strength of about 406,000 troops** to about 355,000 men -- a drop of nearly 13%. The 51,000-man decrease in South Vietnam's combat units was fairly evenly spread between the ARVN/VNMC and the territorial battalions. The ARVN and Marine units suffered a decline of about 12%, dropping from about 239,000 troops in March to a November strength of about 210,000 men. The territorials fell by 13% -- from some 167,000 troops to about 145,000 men during the same period.

* South Vietnamese regular combat forces consist of ARVN's 12 infantry divisions, the Marine Division, 15 ranger groups, and supporting armor and artillery units, and 360 Regional Force battalions.

** Newly received information indicates that the 372,000-man estimate of South Vietnamese strength shown in this report since March 1974 understated the actual force level. This resulted from the use of incomplete data in estimating the strength of Regional Force battalions, which in March 1974 actually had an assigned strength of about 167,000 men instead of the 133,000 reported.

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On a regional basis, Communist losses caused a decline in strength in each of the Military Regions, although the decrease in MR 2 was recently more than offset by the arrival of the NVA 968th Infantry Division from southern Laos. The largest relative decline occurred in MR 4, where force levels fell 8%, followed by MR 3 with more than 5%, and MR 1 with 4%. A similar pattern occurred for friendly combat forces, as the largest relative decline also occurred in MR 4, falling by nearly 17% since March. GVN combat forces in MR 3 dropped 13%, while MR 1 and MR 2 units suffered drops of 11% and 8%, respectively. This order may change, however, when more complete data reflecting the high level of combat in MR 3 during the past six weeks are received.

Specifically, in MR 1, losses suffered by North Vietnamese regular combat forces during the heavy fighting that occurred in the region between August and November lowered the overall force level there by some 3,000 troops. Hardest hit were the NVA 324B Division in Thua Thien Province and the 304th Division in Quang Nam Province. As a result, Communist combat forces in the region are estimated to have decreased from 84,000 to 81,000 troops.

South Vietnamese units in MR 1 declined from a strength of about 108,000 men to 96,000 troops between March and November 1974. A substantial portion of the drop can be attributed to heavy casualties suffered by the ARVN main forces - particularly the Airborne, 1st, 2d, and 3d Divisions - during the heavy combat of late summer and early fall. Regional forces (RF) also suffered heavy losses - especially in Quang Ngai Province. Many of these losses, however, were offset by the upgrading of some local and provincial forces into the RF battalion structure. If the draft is not increased, GVN combat strength in MR 1 can be expected to drop further as personnel from the Airborne and Marine Divisions are withdrawn from MR 1 to establish new brigades in the Saigon area during the next several months.

In MR 2, attrition reduced Communist force levels by an estimated 2,000 men. These losses were suffered primarily by the NVA 3d and 320th Divisions in Binh Dinh and Pleiku Provinces, respectively, over the past several months. In addition, the recent redeployment of the NVA 812th Infantry Regiment from southern MR 2 to Binh Tuy Province in eastern MR 3 further reduced Communist combat strength by about 1,000 men. The move of the NVA 968th Infantry Division with some 4,000 troops into MR 2, however, offset these reductions and caused the Communists' forces in MR 2 to increase by about 1,000 troops, to 41,000.

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The GVN strength in MR 2 fell by some 7,000 troops - from about 85,000 in March to some 78,000 in November. Most of this decline occurred within the ARVN 22d Division in Binh Dinh Province and the regional force battalions defending key outposts and LOCs in the highlands and along the coast. Although South Vietnamese units in MR 2 have performed fairly well in most encounters with the Communists since March, continued attrition of combat units will seriously impair their capability to effectively defend Pleiku and Kontum cities.

In MR 3 the Communists incurred their heaviest losses in recent fighting in Phuoc Long, Binh Tuy, and Tay Ninh Provinces, causing the overall force level in the region to drop from 37,000 to 35,000 troops. In Phuoc Long, the newly formed 3d Division bore the brunt of the fighting in capturing control of the province, while in Binh Tuy, the 303d Division was responsible for the capture of Tan Linh district town. At the same time, the NVA 101st and 205th Independent Infantry Regiments sustained heavy losses in the fighting around Tay Ninh City and in the seizure of Ba Den Mountain.

Although complete results of the Communists' recent military campaigns in MR 3 are not yet reflected in GVN strengths, the latest available data indicate that South Vietnamese combat forces in the region have decreased by at least 14,000 men - from 104,000 to 90,000. The decline reflects in part the intense combat in midsummer around Ben Cat and in northeastern Binh Duong Province, which involved extensive participation by all three ARVN divisions in MR 3.

In MR 4 the decline in Communist strength - from 26,000 to 24,000 men - resulted primarily from actions in Kien Tuong Province where the NVA 5th Division suffered moderate casualties and in Chuong Thien Province where NVA regiments have been engaging South Vietnamese forces in an attempt to expand Communist control in the area. Moreover, losses also have been incurred by the newly created NVA 8th Division in fighting in Dinh Tuong Province as well as by the NVA D-3 Regiment in actions along the border between the Vinh Long and Vinh Binh Provinces.

On the South Vietnamese side, combat strength declined by some 18,000 men in MR 4, from 109,000 in March to 91,000 troops in November. The sharp drop in strength occurred primarily in the regional force battalions, accounting for more than three-fourths of the decrease. In contrast, the ARVN forces in the region suffered the lowest force reductions of any of the military regions.